CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An automated accounts payable method comprising:

obtaining an image of each of a plurality of accounts payable documents;

processing the images to extract data from them;

processing the extracted data to reconcile purchases; and

issuing payment for reconciled purchases.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein processing the data to reconcile purchases comprises processing the extracted data to reconcile items billed for with items ordered and delivered.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the accounts payable documents comprise at least one of each of a purchase order, a shipping invoice, and a billing invoice.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein the accounts payable documents comprise at least one of each of a credit memo and a debit memo.

5. The method of claim 4 further comprising generating a report of non-reconciled events.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein issuing payment comprises printing a check.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein the images of each of at least two documents are part of an image showing all of the at least two documents.

8. An accounts payable data collection system comprising:

a mechanism adapted to assign a type from a set of types to each of a plurality of images, wherein the plurality of images comprises images of accounts payable documents;

a first unit adapted to process images of a first type;

a second unit adapted to process images of a second type wherein the second type is not the first type;

a routing unit adapted to route images assigned the first type to the first processing unit and images assigned the second type to the second processing unit.

9.   The system of claim 8 wherein the images comprise images of at least two of the following: purchase orders, shipping invoices, billing invoices, credit memos, and debit memos.

10.   The system of claim 9 further comprising a unit adapted to accept documents for imaging and to obtain the plurality of images by obtaining images of any accepted documents.

11   The system of claim 10 further comprising a document sorting unit adapted to sort received documents based on the types assigned to the document images.

12.   The system of claim 11 further comprising a document marking unit adapted to mark each of the received documents with a mark corresponding to the type assigned to an image of the document.

13.   A method of data collection comprising obtaining an image of a document, assigning a type to the image, and processing the image based on the type assigned to it.

14.   The method of claim 13 wherein the type assigned is determined at least in part by the dimensions of the document.

15.   The method of claim 13 wherein the type assigned is determined at least by identifying a trademark that is part of the image.

16.   The method of claim 13 comprising obtaining images of a plurality of documents, assigning a type to each of the plurality of images, and processing each of the plurality of images based on the type assigned to it.

17.   The method of claim 16 wherein the plurality of documents comprise at least some checks and at least some invoices, and processing each of the plurality of images results in an automated accounting system being updated to include data obtained from each of the at least some checks and at least some invoices.

18.   The method of claim 17 wherein a single check type is assigned to each image of a plurality of images of received checks, and the check type is assigned at least in part based on dimensions of the document being imaged.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the check type is assigned at least in part based on identifying portions of the image that likely correspond to at least some of the following: a check number, a bar code, the text "pay to the order of", a signature, a payee, a date, and a payment amount.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the value of a portion of the bar code is determined to correspond to a value used to identify a known financial institution as part of the process of assigning a type to the document image.

21. The method of claim 16 wherein processing each of the plurality of images comprises obtaining at least one additional image of the document for at least some document types.